



REGULATION AND PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Regulation and Planning Policy Committee held by video link on Monday 12 October 2020 at 10.00am

Committee Members Present: Councillors: F Ellis, (Chairman) B Duffin, J Halls, W Kemp, S Nuri-Nixon, J Savage, V Thomson

Apologies Councillor: P Hardy, T Spruce
Cabinet Members in Attendance: Councillor: Y Bendle, J Fuller

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor: V Clifford-Jackson

Officers in Attendance: The Assistant Director Planning (Helen Mellors), Place Shaping Manager (Paul Harris), Principal Infrastructure and Planning Policy Officer (Simon Marjoram), Business Improvement Team Manager (Stuart Pontin).

Also in Attendance: Two members of the public (Mr Gledhill and Mr Smith from Bunwell Parish Council)

68 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

69 SOUTH NORFOLK VILLAGE CLUSTERS HOUSING ALLOCATION – PROGRESS REPORT

The Principal Infrastructure and Planning Policy Officer presented the report, which set out the progress that had been made in the production of the South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Allocation Plan (VCHAP).

Following recent revisions to the Local Development Scheme timetable, a Reg.18 consultation on the VCHAP was scheduled to commence in February 2021. Reg.18 was the evidence gathering stage of plan preparation, prior to a consultation on a finalised plan under Reg.19, scheduled for September 2021.

As part of the evidence gathering process all site promoters had been contacted to confirm that they were still promoting sites and to seek any amendments in line with the broad parameters agreed by Members for village clusters.

Despite the response deadline being extended to take account of the Covid-19 situation, a substantial number of existing site promoters did not respond. Therefore, it was decided to retain and assess all existing sites, to ensure the widest possible choice of potential allocation sites.

No further sites had been accepted since the end of May, after the assessment criteria had been agreed by Members. However, site promoters had continued to suggest land for possible consideration and these sites would be submitted as part of the Regulation 18 consultation.

Over 450 sites were currently being considered, an increase from the 350 expected at the beginning of the plan making process. Site assessments were now underway supported by additional officer resources from the Development Management Team.

A technical consultation was issued to relevant bodies in late June. These included the Environment Agency, Natural England and various utility providers.

Some consultees had taken the approach of providing information that required officers to 'self-serve' or search for the source data themselves, which slowed the assessment process. The increase in sites, as well as resource and technical issues in working remotely had also slowed the assessment process. However, despite these difficulties approximately 60 percent of the clusters had now been assessed or assessments on those clusters were underway.

The Sustainability Appraisal of the VCHAP was being carried out by AECOM who had also drafted the appended Scoping Report on which Members' comments were sought.

The Scoping Report established the key issues/objectives for the appraisal stages in preparing the VCHAP. These were based on: Accessibility; Biodiversity; Climate Change – adaptation and mitigation; Communities; Economy; Historic Environment; Housing; Land and Soils; Landscape; Transport; and Water. These topics would form part of the site assessment process.

In addition, there was a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the plan. This would inform the plan-making process by identifying constraints, opportunities and recommendations for the VCHAP.

An update to the 2017 Central Norfolk Strategic Housing Market Assessment was being considered and could be used as evidence around the size, type and tenure of housing needed to meet the VCHAP requirements. The VCHAP would also contain overarching policies dealing with housing density, design and general allocation requirements.

In addition, each site proposed for allocation was likely to have a site specific policy for development, which would include areas such as protection of specific features, landscaping and access points.

Members were asked to note that should the site assessments prove too time-consuming, it might be necessary to exclude site specific policy text from the February 2021 Reg. 18 document and instead seek stakeholder's views. A similar approach could be taken to the overarching policies should the required supporting evidence still be pending.

Many aspects of plan production were being met within the existing resources of the Place Shaping Team and it was currently expected that the costs associated with the VCHAP could be met through the budget made available for the Village Cluster plan.

The Committee was advised that the VCHAP was reliant on the GNLP as a basis on which to allocate housing in smaller settlements, and also in setting the overall distribution of development including the housing requirement for the Village Clusters. However, the Government's recent White Paper 'Planning for the Future' proposed a number of fundamental changes to the Local Plan format and process that threw into question the GNLP being adopted in its current form.

Mr Gledhill addressed the Committee and in response to a query it was confirmed that the sites listed in the Appendix B was the final list that was being consulted on, although that did not preclude any further sites being put forward at the Reg.18 stage.

Mr Gledhill expressed concern that the Minutes from the Regulation and Planning Policy Committee meeting in May did not appear on the Council's website until September. It was confirmed that today's Minutes would be available on the website within two weeks.

Mr Gledhill also emphasised the importance of the update being presented at this meeting and that parish councils should be made aware of such an important document. In response, the Chairmen advised the meeting that Ward Members kept their parishes informed when items of interest to them were being discussed.

Mr Gedhill also noted that office space in Norwich was likely to be converted to residential accommodation, as the trend for working from home continued, which could have a significant effect on the number of rural homes required, as well as the need for a new settlement in Greater Norwich.

The Leader advised the Committee that 450 sites had come forward to meet the housing need in small sites that would not overwhelm existing settlements or require expensive infrastructure and could be brought forward by small local developers. He commended the Sustainability Appraisal, but noted that it had been superseded by events, which had led to a pivotal change in the economy. Therefore, it should be ensured that the Council does not allow itself to be constrained by factors that no longer had the same relevance. He noted other factors created by the current crisis, and that there was now nothing more sustainable than superfast broadband to allow people to work from home. He also emphasised that the Plan was for 1,500 out of a total of 45,000 in Greater Norwich and, therefore, must be kept in perspective and should not be turned into an exercise that took up an inordinate amount of time and effort. Finally, he asked that before going out to consultation, the maps be amended to clearly show the clusters being proposed. Also included should be summary statistics regarding their size, location and a realistic estimate of numbers for each site.

In response to a query, the Principal Infrastructure and Planning Policy Officer confirmed that Members of the Committee could still canvass opinion when sites were brought to them for inclusion in the consultation document and suggest alternatives, if they felt any were inappropriate.

A Member thanked the Principal Infrastructure and Planning Policy Officer for answering a number of questions that he had submitted by email prior to the meeting, but noted that whilst work was being carried out it was being overtaken by the Government's Planning White Paper, which would propose much higher density housing than was currently being planned for.

The Principal Infrastructure and Planning Policy Officer then responded to the questions submitted by the Member that had not already been covered.

- It was confirmed that sites larger than the small sites required for the VCHAP would have to be submitted through the Greater Norwich Local Plan process and would not be included within the village clusters consultation.
- A balance was being sought between the provision of housing and sustainable travel commensurate with a rural area and this would be articulated throughout the VCHAP and the Sustainability Appraisal.
- The term 'where possible' used in reference to transport infrastructure between village clusters reflected the reality that this would not always be achievable in rural locations.
- The Government already used a formula to decide on the number of dwelling required and categorised the District into areas for allocations development boundaries and the countryside. The White Paper should simplify this process, however.
- The uptick in CO₂ emissions was shown in the report, as a trend that the Council would like to reduce.
- The objective to provide 'sustainable transport' aimed to be a package of measures, including short everyday journeys viable on foot and developing clusters that sustain local services.
- A reference to affordable housing would be added to page 80 of the Scoping Report.
- The Habitats Regulations Assessment, was a technical advice report that would not usually be for public consumption, if at a later stage it did go out as part of the consultation it would include an executive summary.

In summing up, the Chairman emphasised that the Allocation Plan was for village clusters, rather than individual parishes.

RESOLVED

1. to note the content of the progress report; and
2. to note the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report.

70 PLANNING ENFORCEMENT PLAN AND STRATEGY

The Business Improvement Team Manager introduced the report, which presented an updated Enforcement Plan and Strategy, following an audit of the Planning Enforcement Service in early 2020.

The Plan would now include a more proactive approach towards the monitoring of the commencement of developments with planning permission to ensure compliance with associated conditions.

To ensure that Members had an overview of current cases it was also proposed that a monthly report be provided to all Members, which would highlight work being undertaken. Training would also be provided to allow Members to make best use of this information.

The Leader advised the meeting that he did not consider that sufficient weight had been given in the draft Enforcement Plan to matters of urgency and public interest, where rapid action was required.

In response, the Business Improvement Team Manager drew Members' attention to the section in the Plan, which provided for prioritisation of issues where the greatest harm was being caused on a case by case basis.

In response to a query, it was confirmed that the intention was that the Plan would be common to both South Norfolk and Broadland District Council.

A Member suggested that the language in the Plan should be made more explicit and he suggested that one of the areas prioritised should be where there was clear and wilful disregard for the law.

In response the Business Improvement Team Manager noted the concerns raised, but also emphasised that a value judgement about the level of harm caused would often need to be made. However, he confirmed that officers would prioritise enforcement, where harm was caused.

The Chairman proposed the recommendations in the report, subject to the inclusion of the suggestions made by Members in respect of urgency in dealing with actions causing severe harm and in cases where there had been a clear and wilful disregard of the law.

RESOLVED

To recommend to Cabinet

1. To agree the use of the Enforcement Plan at Appendix 1 for the Planning Enforcement Service at South Norfolk Council, *subject to the inclusion of the suggestions made by Members above; and*
2. To agree the use of the Enforcement Strategy at Appendix 2 for the Planning Enforcement Service at South Norfolk Council.

(The meeting concluded 11.28 pm)

Chairman